

**Briefing Paper**

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# **PUBLIC OPINION UPDATE ON INF**

USIA-commissioned national public opinion surveys taken during June in the five basing countries suggest some problems and opportunities for U.S. policy.

## **The Setting: Opposition Predominates to INF Deployment**

Outside Britain, where a large majority supports INF stationing, public opposition clearly prevails to stationing in their own country. Moreover, the extent of the opposition would be as widespread to deployment of a reduced number of new missiles agreed on by the U.S. and the Soviet Union, as it is to stationing in the absence of an arms control agreement.

Negative attitudes toward deploying an agreed-upon reduced number of Euromissiles may be influenced somewhat by a widely prevailing disbelief that the superpowers will reach an agreement by the end of the year.

## **PROBLEMS FOR THE U.S.: U.S. Assumptions Not Accepted**

INF support and opposition are expressed in a public opinion climate of widespread unawareness or unwillingness to accept some basic assumptions inherent in U.S. policy:

- o Soviet INF Monopoly: Generally Not Perceived. Only about one in 10 know about the Soviet INF monopoly. The public debate about the French and British missiles, sparked by the second Andropov proposal, may have clouded the issue for the majorities or near-majorities everywhere who believe that "both" sides have Euromissiles in place.
- o Soviet INF Supremacy: Largely Not Recognized. Monopoly aside, even the Soviet superiority in missile strength in Europe tends to go unrecognized, except among the British public. Elsewhere, about as many (more in Belgium) perceive an existing superpower parity in Euromissiles, as see the Soviet Union ahead.
- o INF Deterrence Value: Widely Appreciated Only in Britain: In the continental basing countries, opinion is largely divided on whether the new Euromissiles would help prevent or increase the likelihood of a Soviet attack on Western Europe. (Opponents to deployment justify their position mainly by citing heightened danger, increased vulnerability, and fear of war.) The British public, polled immediately after the recent election, widely endorses INF as a deterrent force.

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- o British and French Missiles: Confusion. Britain excepted, the view prevails that the British and French missiles are intended for national rather than for NATO's defense. British opinion splits on this score. At the same time, by wide margins, the publics in all basing countries think these missiles should be part of the U.S.-Soviet arms reduction talks. This seeming paradox, to some extent, probably reflects general anti-nuclear missile sentiment as well as the widespread unfamiliarity among the general public with the details of arms talks negotiations.

OPPORTUNITY FOR THE U.S.: Receptivity to U.S. Negotiating Efforts

Further U.S. INF initiatives at Geneva are likely to receive a sympathetic hearing from publics preoccupied with pressing economic and social problems.

- o U.S. Motives Credible. While, on the whole, they tend to lack confidence in U.S. ability to deal with world problems, Europeans generally credit the U.S. with making a genuine effort to reach an arms reduction agreement with the Soviet Union. Only Italian public sentiments tend in the opposite direction. By contrast, perceptions of Soviet sincerity are one-sidedly negative. A notable exception is the German public which is divided on the issue.
- o Reagan Proposal Preferred. Choosing between the Reagan interim proposal and the second Andropov proposal, European public opinion clearly favors the U.S. position. Given the ambivalent -- or uninformed -- reactions to the British and French missiles' intended purpose and their role in arms talk negotiations, the rejection of the Soviet proposal may have less to do with its specific provisions than with public perceptions of U.S. and Soviet credibility. And the U.S. has consistently scored better on such indicators.
- o INF Not A Central Public Concern. Compared with overriding economic and social problems, Europeans accord INF stationing a low ranking among worrisome national issues. (Characteristically, most are unaware when deployment is scheduled to begin). In keeping with this perspective, public activism in opposition to deployment is reported only by very small proportions of the general public. Belgians are the least involved in INF; the Dutch the most active.

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